AIN'T I A WOMAN

A MIDWEST NEWSPAPER OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION

VOL.2 NO.4. NOV. 19, 1971

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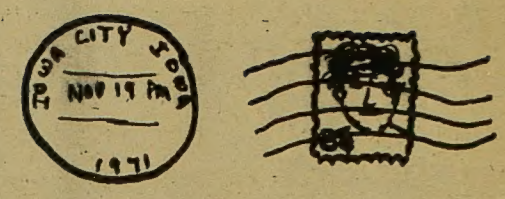
From Edmonton to Iowa City · · · and Back



We are Sibylline House--four women, one of us seven years old--in Edmonton, Alberta. We have been building a strong, stable women's house. Struggle! is coming out of ideas that we have evolved through building our house, reading women's papers, and being with women. Now we want to share some of those ideas, so here they are. We would appreciate it if our articles were only reprinted in their totality and were not quoted out of context.

We have been distressed lately at some of the attitudes we have been picking up on from the women's papers we receive. The things we disagree with are (1) that middle-class is being equated with reformist and that middle-class women must either deny their class background or resign themselved to being reformist, (2) glorification of lower and/or working class, and (3) that distinct class lines and a pure Marxist analysis fit a contemporary North American revolution.

(1) We consider it a basic principle of revolutionary politics that every woman work out of her own experience, which includes class background. This does not mean that we maintain the values of that class, but that we accept our class background and with this consciousness, work with women of a similar background for the revolution. I guess what we are trying to say is that we cannot deny or negate our class. Middle-class women cannot and should not try to become working-class.

Implied in that last statement is the fact that we (middle class women) have to acknowledge the privileges of our class and not use them to oppress working-class women. On the other hand, let us not guilt-trip middle-class women into denying their oppression. We disagree with the assumption that since we are primarily a middle-class movement that we are reformists. Being middle-class women does not exclude us from developing a revolutionary women's consciousness. "More oppressed than thou, therefore more revolutionary" is not the rule of political consciousness. If we don't have a responsibility to our middle-class sisters then we might as well forget sexism and only fight classism.

(2) Glorification of the lower or working class is a case of mystification or false consciousness. Class consciousness entails the recognition that lower-class women have had a lot of shit laid on them to keep them from becoming integrated human beings. This does not mean that middle-class women are any more together, but they have had more opportunities to engage in human creativity. To glorify working class jobs seems dangerously close to supporting a capitalist class society and denying the working class alienation.

We cannot argue that virtue or righteousness is more in the working class than in the middle class. It is a point of departure from the real issues--what are middle-class values and lower-class values and what is the relation between middle-class and lower-class women in the movement. We seem to be caught up in accusations and confrontations when we should be struggling with each other.

(3) It is not possible for us to draw distinct class lines in North American society. Undeniably there is a span of class, but it is impossible, taking into account all the variables in this society, to draw distinct class lines. Each person's main group identity lies in different groupings than class--black, woman, native, etc. This is one of the reasons that a Marxist class analysis does not work here/now. Our analysis must work in reality not in our heads. Beyond this very practical problem, we must also be willing to examine the Marxist class analysis approach to revolution very carefully. A revolution in the 20th century, at any rate, cannot be based solely upon the basic needs of the lower class, for those needs can be filled by other means than a socialist revolution. A revolutionary vision of a free society requires a revolution based upon the need for freedom, which can be more clearly felt once basic needs are satisfied. We do not mean that lower-class issues are not an important part of the revolution, but that lower class issues are not the only issues that are revolutionary. Class is one of the problems that exists in the women's movement. But class is one of the issues that can be dealt with within our movement; it should not be a hostile split. Lower class women working from their experience in a revolutionary way and middle-class women working from their experience in a revolutionary way need not oppress each other. Middle-class women must learn not to oppress lower-class women, and lower-class women must not guilt-trip middle-class women. But if we are not attempting to do each other's work, we are much less likely to oppress each other.

The issue is not too different from the gay-straight issue and the Canadian-American issue--both of which can be dealt with within the movement, rather than splitting the movement through hostile confrontation politics directed toward each other.

We are looking forward to some response to our ideas, and will be sending more as we get them out.

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When we received Struggle!, we knew that we wanted to respond to it. First, because we disagree with their interpretation of the kind of class analysis that we're doing; second, because we disagree with their analysis; and third, because we're a predominantly middle-class collective, we feel a responsibility to deal with the classism we find in other middle-class women as well as the classism we find in ourselves.

So here's our response to Struggle! The first article was written by middle-class women and the second by a working-class member of the collective.

We agree that middle-class women should not deny their class background. But it really doesn't matter whether we agree or not because it's impossible. How can you deny what has formed you? It's too late.

But what kind of "revolution" can we make if we "accept our class background and with this consciousness, work (with) women of a similar background for the revolution"? Obviously one which meets the needs of middle-class women only, because not only do we not know the needs of working-class women, we oppress them. How can we change that if we don't listen to and learn from working class women? It's like when we say we won't take part in a male-dominated revolution because we would still be oppressed. Why should working-class women trust us anymore than we trust men?

The women of Struggle say that "we (middle-class women) have to acknowledge the privileges of our class and not use them to oppress working-class women." That's a contradiction. Our privileges, and the way we got them, are oppressive. It's not the kind of thing that you can simply acknowledge and then go on your way. What middle-class women cannot get into their (our) heads is that we'll pay for living so well for so long. Do you think we've all been treated so well by this society because we're inherently better than working-class people? We have participated in the capitalist society, we reap its benefits, and our continued participation perpetuates it. There's no other way to look at it. And we'll have to pay for our privileges.

"'More oppressed than thou, therefore more revolutionary' is not the rule of political consciousness." The needs of the last shall come first. That seems to be the point. If a revolution does not include the most oppressed, if it's not made by the most oppressed, if it's just some concept that exists only in the heads of middle-class women, then it's not a revolution at all. It feels like a nice idea, like Mississippi Summer when all the liberal white kids went South to free the blacks felt like a nice idea, but it's merely that--an idea that sounds good. Whites can't/won't free the blacks, and middle-class women can't/won't make a revolution for the people they oppress. All the "right ons" in the world won't change that reality.

"Lower-class women have had a lot of shit laid on them to keep them from becoming integrated human beings." Christ, who are we to say what constitutes an integrated human being? That really is class chauvinism. And, anyway, the kind of person who can be integrated into a society that bases its philosophy on the idea that money is more important than human life, a society based on racism, sexism and classism, a society that systematically excludes those without power (money), anyone who's integrated in this shitpile must seriously question the privilege that brought about this state of integration. (Maybe the only "integrated" people in this society are in jails and mental institutions.)

Middle-class women "have had more time to engage in human creativity." Says who? Supporting yourself, two kids, (and probably your husband) on a $199 ADC check is one of the most creative things a human being could do. It's at least as creative as a consciousness-raising group. Being a street kid takes human creativity. The very act of living in a society that constantly tells you (via TV, magazines, advertising) that you're shit if you don't have money, is a supreme creative effort and working-class women do it every day.

One point about glorifying jobs. Waitresses, janitors, maids and clerks don't make their living directly off the flesh of other human beings, like stockbrokers, executives, factory owners and rock music festival promoters do. So in that sense, working-class jobs should be glorified.

Struggle women are upset with being "caught up in accusations and confrontations when we should be struggling with each other." What's the difference? Isn't it just that our middle-class "sensibilities" are offended by raised voices and anger? We've got to get the pigshit out of our heads that equates confrontation with non-productivity. Of course there's anger. Of course middle-class women will be confronted. But we can't just say "Sisters, let's join hands and discuss this rationally." The anger is real and justified and we've got to deal with it and listen to it and change. That's the rub. We're so fucking smug about this "revolution" that we're making that we can't stand the heat and the criticism. One thing is for sure--the revolution can go on without us.

continued from page 2

A REVOLUTION IS AN INSURRECTION, AN ACT OF VIOLENCE BY WHICH ONE CLASS OVERTHROWS ANOTHER.

My first reaction to the ideas in Struggle! is that anyone who thinks the middle-class can make a revolution that will benefit anyone but the middle-class is a reactionary who doesn't deserve to be struggled with. Let them tell me what they've done lately, but I'm not interested in continuing dialogues to assure middle-class women that they're coming up with a good analysis. And I think many women have stopped trying. And I don't think those women can be accused of not struggling--in most cases they've simply given up on wasting time and energy on a hopeless case.

The ideas in the article bring to my mind so many useless, painful attempts to tell middle-class women to get off their asses and get some of the middle-class shit out of their heads--to stop thinking that lower-class women want to make them feel guilty. A guilt-trip is something middle-class women can afford to engage in. It means that when they realize the objective place they hold in a class system instead of trying to do something about that system, they claim they had nothing to do with setting up the system, then they blame lower-class women for making them feel bad. To these women a guilt trip is equivalent to not having money or a job or a decent place to live. How absurd.

Only a middle-class woman would think you can separate a fight against sexism (or racism or imperialism) from a fight against classism. How does one fight "only classism"? This split that exists in the heads of middle-class women does not exist in the reality of lower-class women's lives. If middle-class women see that sort of split, let them do whatever they want to, but don't let them kid anyone about the revolutionary nature of their acts. It's a pity middle-class women don't want to negate that class, because that's exactly what we have to do, in the same way we have to negate the center of imperialism. We can't simply resolve to not oppress other countries and recognize our privileges--everyone always told us we had it good in the "land of the free and the home of the brave."

How can a middle-class woman acknowledge her privileges and not use them to oppress other women? That's an issue. "What are middle-class values and lower-class values" is no issue. Only middle-class women who think of lower-class women as some kind of wierd creatures from another planet could think of that as an issue.

Only a middle-class woman could call a source of oppression a "variable" and think that's reality. What reality is there in talking of people in terms of "main group identities" as if that were something like putting on a hat or deciding to go to a movie. (Whose main group identity would be white, man, non-native, etc. in that sort of thinking?) Being black, a woman, a native is a source of oppression and that's the significance. And those groups have been consigned to a class category--the lower class and powerless--because of their "group identity."

A middle-class revolution is a contradiction in terms.

An example of the "class consciousness" of middle-class women is perfectly stated: "Class consciousness entails the recognitior that lower-class women have had a lot of shit laid on them to keep them from becoming integrated human beings." (Isn't that what all middle-class girls learn--that at least they have their class status to cling to, that they should be nice to those poor unfortunates who don't have as much as they do, but for God's sake dont' try to become one of them or have too much to do with them.)

I shudder to think of how unintegrated the women of Vietnam, of Latin America, or Africa must be. The very assertion that middle-class women have the "vision of freedom" and insight to make a revolution is reactionary. I've seen that vision and I reject it because I don't choose to lay down in shit. That's what I think of those humanly "creative" acts of middle-class women who can't understand that most everything they say and do "glorifies" the middle-class which is the real upholder of this system. How can we possibly resolve class within the women's movement when the first reminder of their class privileges sends them into fits of concern that we might "glorify" the workin class.

Middle-class women had better look at their self-centered ideas about "class consciousness" and class. They'd better look at the opportunities they've had and the lives they lead as making them handicapped from becoming revolutionaries and get rid of whatever ideas and possession that uphold the class system. They'd better be able to understand that working class jobs are more valuable as socially necessary labor than most of the jobs they do. They'd better stop seeing middle-class unused labor as wasted but working-class labor as expendable. They'd better discard those slogans (equal pay for equal work, a waste of woman-power) that are used to benefit only the middle-class. If what we want is available only for middle-class women, if the jobs we want are all middle-class jobs, if the rewards we want are all tokens of the middle-class, don't dare to call that revolutionary.

I really choke on the term "contemporary North American revolution" because so much of the confusion we feel is used to make us think of ourselves as unique, as the ultimate in revolutions, as having transcended the problems of other poorer, "backward" places, as the most revolutionary and conscious of women. None of those things is true.

CITIES CITIES CITIES

I left Iowa City with the idea of perhaps not returning because possibly I could find work in a city and probably because living in Iowa City where jobs are few seemed an indulgence I couldn't afford, especially after my living collective ended.

Before I left town people were genuinely concerned with the issue of class and what they should be doing--what actions would speak to the inequity between women due solely to economic class. Mostly our discussions centered around the necessity for middle-class women sharing their resources with working and lower class women. There is a lot to be said about that, and I don't want to be misunderstood in matters so dear to me like accepting the excess funds that middle class women want to unload. And they actually should unload them or someone will get it together to rip them off. Still the problem of excess belongs to those middle-class women. It's a problem I cannot relate to and I don't think it speaks too directly to the problems of working and lower class women.

I've been thinking of this lately in the context of my personal dilemma of whether to stay in the city or move back to Iowa City and have realized that I can only think of going back because I know and have worked with middle-class women there who, because of probably a combination of guilt, responsibility and political conviction can help me out materially. Despite how I feel personally about that (sometimes guilty, dependent, inferior and angry at the position I am in and the timidity it requires), it's an option most people don't have.

A woman who has no independent wealth or no rich friends or no middle-class lover cannot consider moving to an area where she cannot find a job. But Iowa City is a real nice place to live. It's clean and pretty and the pace and size of the town are a relief to anyone used to a city. But Iowa City systematically keeps poor and working people from entering or staying in that community. There are no jobs and no possibility of getting welfare unless you have children and can get ADC. Probably it's like any other clean, livable place in this country--it is reserved for those with money.

The cities are for sure the ghettos of the poor. Jobs may not be plentiful or one can't be selective, but there are jobs so women can earn some money which, of course, will be eaten up by outrageously high rents for slummy apartments. After buying food, no more bread till the next paycheck and you're stuck in that city and that crummy apartment for as long as you live, dreaming of places like Iowa City where I lived with help from my rich friends Well, nobody ever really believed in the American dream.

The differences between living in the city I now live in and Iowa City are shocking to me. After two years of comfort I remember how there is no surplus of material goods in a city. In Iowa City there was always furniture and appliances other women didn't need, a couch someone wanted to get rid of when they moved. I guess I really got in on the collectivity of the privileged. But here if someone needs a table the chances of getting one laid on you are slim indeed.

I should at this point define the perspective I am writing from which is that of a working class woman who has no independent means of support, who managed to live a middle-class life in a middle-class community for a couple of years and now is in a city in a not middle-class community and relating to other women who have to hassle to survive. I realize that there are most certainly middle-class communities in this area but I have no connections to be allowed to float into them--which makes me flash on how I achieved the middle-class existence I floated into in Iowa City. I came there with a perfectly acceptable middle-class, heterosexual label--student wife. That label got me a job in the university and indirectly gave me introductions to my better endowed sisters who supported me. My label now is working class dyke and that gets you nowhere.

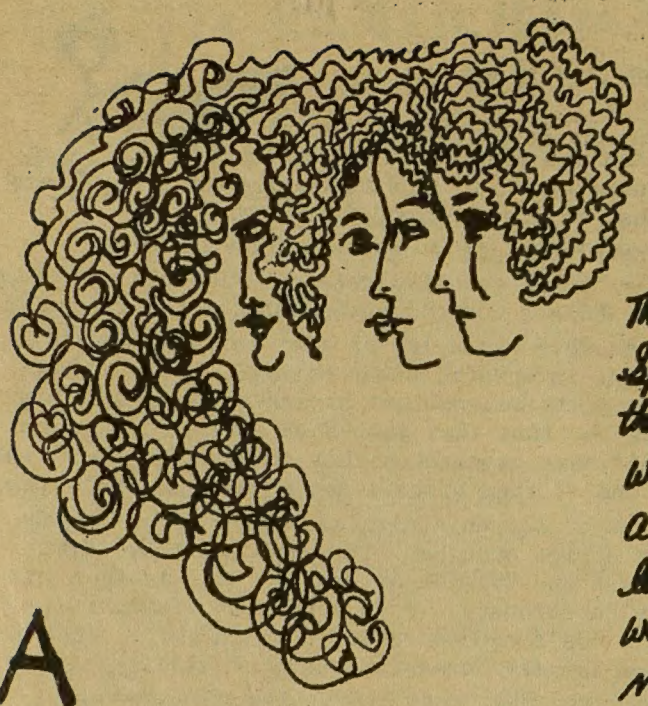
I guess I think the direction women should be taking is to examine their communities. In this case, Iowa City and from there perhaps it will become clearer what we should be doing--what direction we should be going. It appears that to deal with class adequately we must start fighting to open up that community to those women who do not have extra wealth. That implies fighting for housing and jobs for women who must support themselves.

There are obvious problems.

There is no invisibility in that small a community (about 50 thousand people--20 thousand of them students). Can you see a woman walking around downtown? Any political involvement makes a woman well known and therefore easy for the community to starve out, which is the weapon such communities use. And the town is full of middle-class women who could and will easily grab any of the advantages (jobs/housing, etc.) that we might win.

The best way to deal with class in that town may be to get out of it or level it. Probably in reverse order.

ANNOUNCEMENTS



Sisters-

The second edition of Lesbians Speak Out is forthcoming. Being the only book of its kind, we would like to include as wide a range of material about lesbians as possible. And so, we need your help. Please mention this in your newspaper or newsletter and put this on a bulletin board.

Send us articles, poetry, songs, pictures, drawings, maps, graphs, photographs, short stories plus any whatevers there are available. We would like to have these by midnight, December 31, 1971.

Love,
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P.S. We are trying to put together a book of lesbian letters too, if any of these are available and fascinating.

We can only return material if it's accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

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cover by women's press collective

Times Change PRESS

This was to be a twelve page paper with 4 pages of medical self-Help material on menstrual extraction. However, we couldn't get them printed.

New Publications from Times Change Press

UNBECOMING MEN: A Men's Consciousness-Raising Group Writes on Oppression and Themselves
BURN THIS AND MEMORIZE YOURSELF: Poems for Women by Alta; photos Ellen Shumsky
LISTEN, MARXIST! An Anarchist Approach to Revolution by Murray Bookchin
GENERATIONS OF DENIAL: 75 Short Biographies of Women in History by Kathryn Taylor

Two new posters are:

KIDS LIBERATIONVILLE: Two Kids' Idea of Freedom by Lexie Negrin and Paul Negrin
SISTERHOOD FEELS GOOD: Two Women Asleep in Bed by Donna Gottschalk

TIMES CHANGE PRESS 1023 SIXTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10018

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If your group wants to receive bundles of Ain't I A Woman? you can send 15¢ per copy (minimum bundle: 20 copies) in advance.

Photos by June Smith on pages 11 and 12

AIN'T I A WOMAN?

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52240

WOMEN'S MEDICINE or The Doctor IS in. OUT

THINGS TO BE DONE

1. Get alot of practice in examining ourselves and each other.
2. Teach other women to examine themselves.
3. Look into the possibility of getting a doctor, medical student or laboratory technician to teach you how to do Pap smears and how to interpret the results (or connect up with lab workers who will process the smears for you).
4. Keep good records of what you're doing-medical histories, detailed discriptions of problems you've encountered and how they were or weren't solved. Keep a notebook that will be open for any woman to write accounts of her experiences with hassles she's encountered with particular doctors, with methods of birth control or any medical problems.
5. Do consciousness raising on every aspect of women's health that you can think of.... how women have been messed over by the medical profession,why women are uptight about their bodies, how to support women and meet their needs so that they don't have to feel messed up and freaked out...so that they don't end up going to shrinks to get messed over more.

HELPFUL THINGS TO KNOW

1. Plastic speculums are available in quantity from physician's supply houses (as are most other supplies you will need). Just try ordering what you need. If they hassle you about not being a doctor, get a free clinic or a sympathetic doctor to help you in ordering. Generally, you can order these kind of supplies with no questions asked.
2. Hospitals keep large supplies of K-Y jelly, plastic gloves, q-tips and other useful items. If you know of any women who are nursing students, nurse's aids or have any contact with hospital workers they can probably get alot of supplies free.
3. If each woman keeps her own speculum and glove to be used only on herself for every examination, it will cut down on the quantity you need.

In the last year and a half several of us have made some attempts to find a way to educate ourselves and other women about our bodies and health care. We knew enough to mistrust most medical professionals, but we didn't really know where to begin in self education. We attempted to get a women's health course together, but it failed. Some of us took a civil defense medical self-help course which was o.k. for basic first aid, but that's all. I attempted to be involved in the free medical clinic which is run by some concerned and "hip" people, but I quit because I saw the same male professional bullshit controlling the clinic and continuing to neglect women's needs. I suppose the main reason our medical issues group didn't get off the ground was because none of us were interested in health care for women as our primary concern. There just weren't enough of us to do everything at once. But while we were knowing in our heads that there must be some way to deal with medical problems of women, there were women who were beginning to get into things in a productive way. Those women are now sharing the basic things they've learned with other women all over the country...teaching us to learn about ourselves and other women and encouraging us to do our own research about health and our bodies. It seems that with care and common sense we can begin to look after ourselves and other women and not depend on medical professionals who have a great deal less concern for our health and comfort than we do.

The women who have been into medical self-help have found that the best place to begin to learn is with our own bodies and those of our friends. We can use our senses (sight, touch and smell) in the same way a physician can to examine ourselves and each other--to learn to identify infection and disease, to begin to know our own anatomy and, in some cases, to learn to recognize early pregnancies. Why should we continue to spend great quantities of money to be abused by doctors when we are quite capable of learning to care for ourselves and each other?

The way we learned things from the self-help clinic women was as exciting as what we learned. It was like the perfect learning situation. Women who had spent time studying and learning about health care were really eager to share every bit of information they knew. They were encouraging us to build women's health care programs and to do research on our own. They trusted us and gave us confidence that we were quite capable of learning everything they knew--and we were trusting of their skill and knowledge. There was no atmosphere of elitism and inequality as in most learning-teaching situations. It was women sharing things they had learned, with no with-holding of information in order to retain the power. The care that we took with each other in learning to do cervical and pelvic examinations was so great. There's just no comparison to being examined by a doctor who is often careless, lacking understanding and closed-mouthed about letting the woman know exactly what's being done and why.

The articles on the following three pages are reprinted from: Everywoman 1043-B W. Washington Blvd. Venice, California 90291

Some Facts About Cancer

Cancer of the cervix is most common among *women in their 40's and 50's. It is unusual in women under 30 and over 70.*

Cancer of the cervix is slow-developing. Researchers estimate that the time from early pre-cancerous stage to definite invasive cancer is ten years.

The chances of having cancer of the cervix in your lifetime are approximately 23 in 1,000.

Most "suspicious lesions" never develop into invasive cancer. If a physician recommends a hysterectomy "just to be on the safe side" we should be sure to get further medical opinions.

EARLY DETECTION AND EARLY TREATMENT are our best precautions. In the early stages cancer can be cured.

SELF-EXAMINATION OF THE CERVIX CAN BE A VALUABLE SUPPLEMENT TO YOUR ANNUAL MEDICAL CHECK-UP.

Symptoms of Cancer

For women not examining themselves regularly:

Bleeding
(postcoital, intermenstrual, postmenopausal.) Menstrual periods which are more profuse or prolonged.

Discharge
marked increase of usual amount or change in nature, especially with an unpleasant odor.

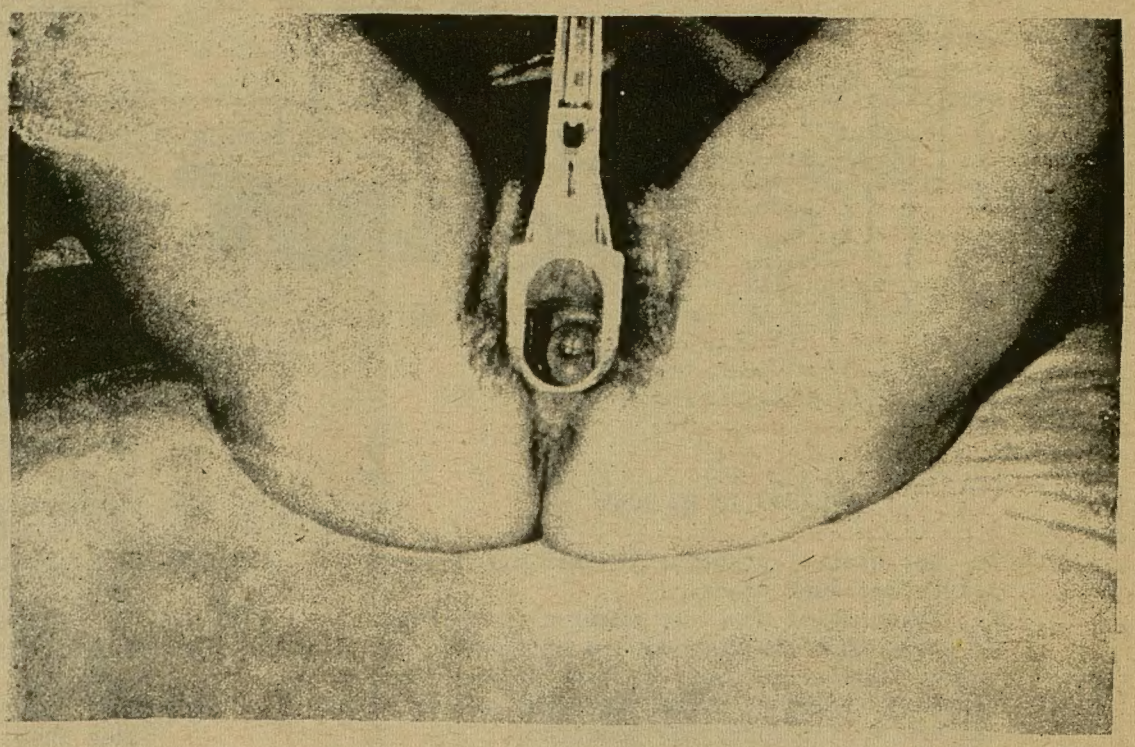
Pain
Cramp-like or steady in low back low portion of the abdomen similar to menstrual cramps.

For women who examine themselves regularly (once a week):
A lesion or growth on cervix.
Discharge from cervix of pus-like fluid.

Pain
Cramp-like or steady in low portion of the abdomen similar to menstrual cramps.

VAGINAL POLITICS

SELF-HELP CLINIC



ENS/SAUNIE

Self-examination of the vagina is really no more shocking or revolutionary a concept than self-examination of the breasts. A physician hasn't the time and most women haven't the money or inclination to facilitate medical examinations as often as would be necessary to catch all early signs of breast cancer, or vaginal infection, venereal disease, cervical cysts, or pregnancy. So the M.D.s came up with breast examination for the home. It has received wide publicity and advocacy. I don't think we can expect the same for vaginal self-examination; the first time I told a doctor that I had examined myself for an infection, he would not believe that I had actually done it. It is, in fact, not nearly as difficult a physical act to perform as might be expected. Any woman can learn to examine herself (although in the learning process a group of five or six women would be optimal.)

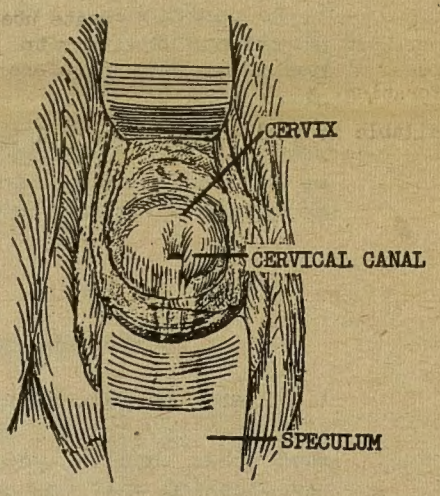
The tools necessary for self-examination are: speculum, directional light, long-handled mirror, and a firm bed or table. (Each woman should have her own speculum to eliminate the transfer of infection. The speculum should be washed with phisohex after each use.) Arrange yourself on the table or bed on your back with knees bent and feet placed far apart. Insert speculum upside-down (when your doctor inserts it, he has the handle pointing down, you need it pointing up so that you can open it). After inserting, open speculum (manipulate your speculum extensively before insertion so that you are well acquainted with it and can use it easily). If you have difficulty, have a friend open it. Point directional light at vagina, place mirror so that you can see your vagina and cervix. If you cannot see your cervix, try withdrawing speculum slightly and sucking your stomach in; cervix should pop into view. If not, have a friend try manipulating the speculum.

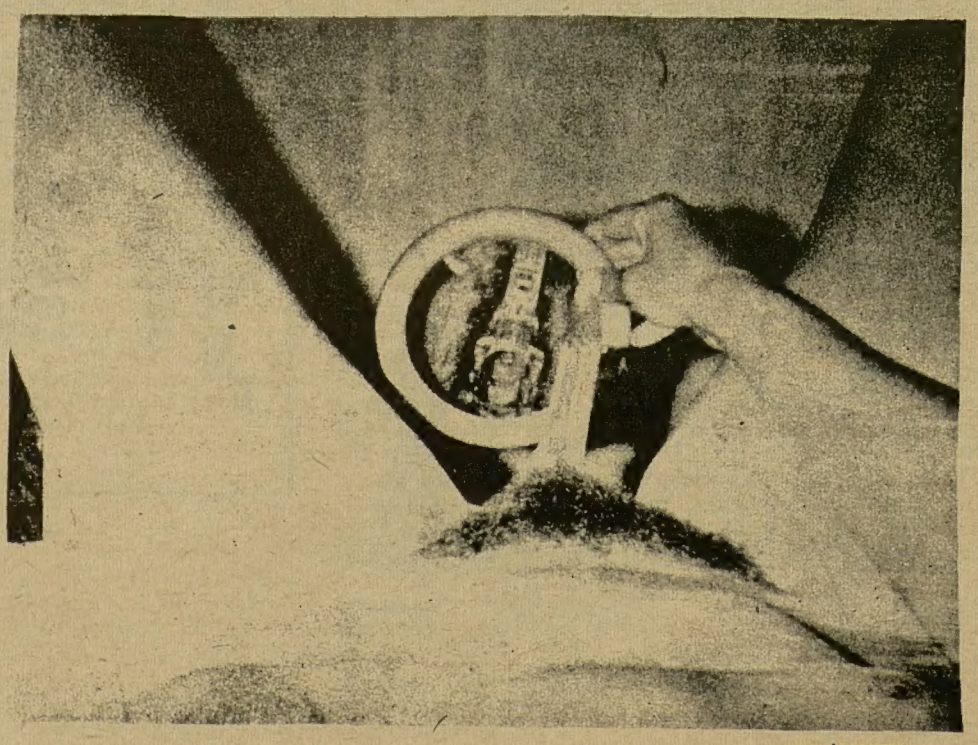
If you have never had a child, your cervix will be small (1 to 1-1/2 inch diameter), pink, smooth and very firm looking. If you have delivered one or more children, your cervix will be larger, perhaps colored differently and the cervical canal will be substantially larger than those of your friends who have not had children. The vagina should also be pink and firm looking, although ridged, and not terribly sensitive to touch (not sore). The vagina has a normal clear or whitish secretion which varies in quantity with each woman.

If the vagina is infected or irritated it becomes swollen, tender to the touch, extremely sensitive to the pressure of the speculum. Upon viewing, the vaginal walls will be inflamed and red (much the same as a sore throat). There may be an increased secretion, usually of a different color. Discharge from a yeast (Monilia) infection looks white and cottage cheesy, and smells like fresh bread. There are some home remedies for yeast infections such as putting yogurt in the vagina to inhibit the growth of yeast fungus. (The vagina has a delicate balance of bacterial and fungal growth which can be easily upset and result in an infection, really an overgrowth of one or the other.) This is why when antibiotics are taken, a yeast infection often results. The antibiotics kill the natural bacteria and the yeast grow wild. Some physicians who are concerned with the comfort of their patients will prescribe Mycostatin (orally or vaginally) along with antibiotics; other physicians concerned with their patients' pocketbooks as well as their comfort will indicate that yogurt will preserve their natural bacteria. And eating yogurt will replace the bacteria in the digestive tract which has been destroyed by the antibiotic.

The vagina and cervix change during the menstrual cycle. Once you are familiar with the changes that occur in your own body, it will become easy to detect an early pregnancy simply by noting the unusual changes, or the lack of the regular one. The only way to give yourself the necessary knowledge of your body is to follow it closely through a menstrual cycle so that you can observe and learn what it looks like at what stage in the cycle. During the first two weeks following menstruation, the healthy cervix and vagina will be pink and firm and smooth, there may be a clear mucous secreted from the cervical canal. Most women have cyclical changes in their vaginal secretions and you may learn that these secretions increase for you at the time of ovulation or one week before menstruating. When you examine yourself just before menstruation you may be shocked to find the vaginal walls swollen and tender, the cervix swollen and blue with veins seeming to pop out on it. This is a perfectly normal pre-menstrual condition and is not the condition in which you would find a two or three week pregnant cervix.

Whatever the changes are in your body, know them. If you suspect you are pregnant, check yourself; if your period is late and your cervix does not appear as it usually does pre-menstrually, you are probably pregnant, and can at least make an intelligent and informed decision.



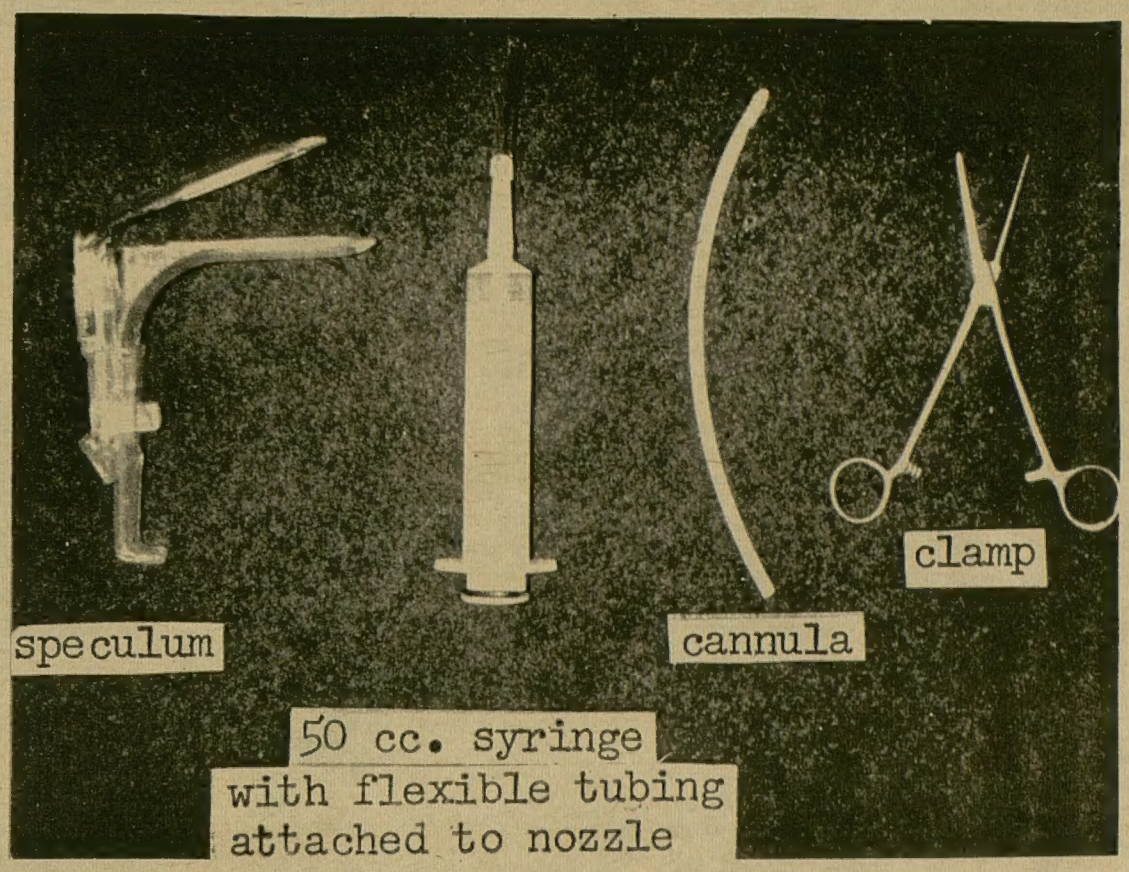


ENS/SAUNIE

MENSTRUAL EXTRACTION

The photographs that accompany this article are misleading in that they give the impression that the woman is doing the menstrual extraction procedure on herself. In fact, it would be quite difficult and probably impossible to perform the extraction on yourself.

All women reading this article should know that although this is a relatively simple procedure, you should not attempt to do it without having the proper equipment and experience. Improvisation, especially creating too much suction or using something other than a Karman cannula, may be quite dangerous.



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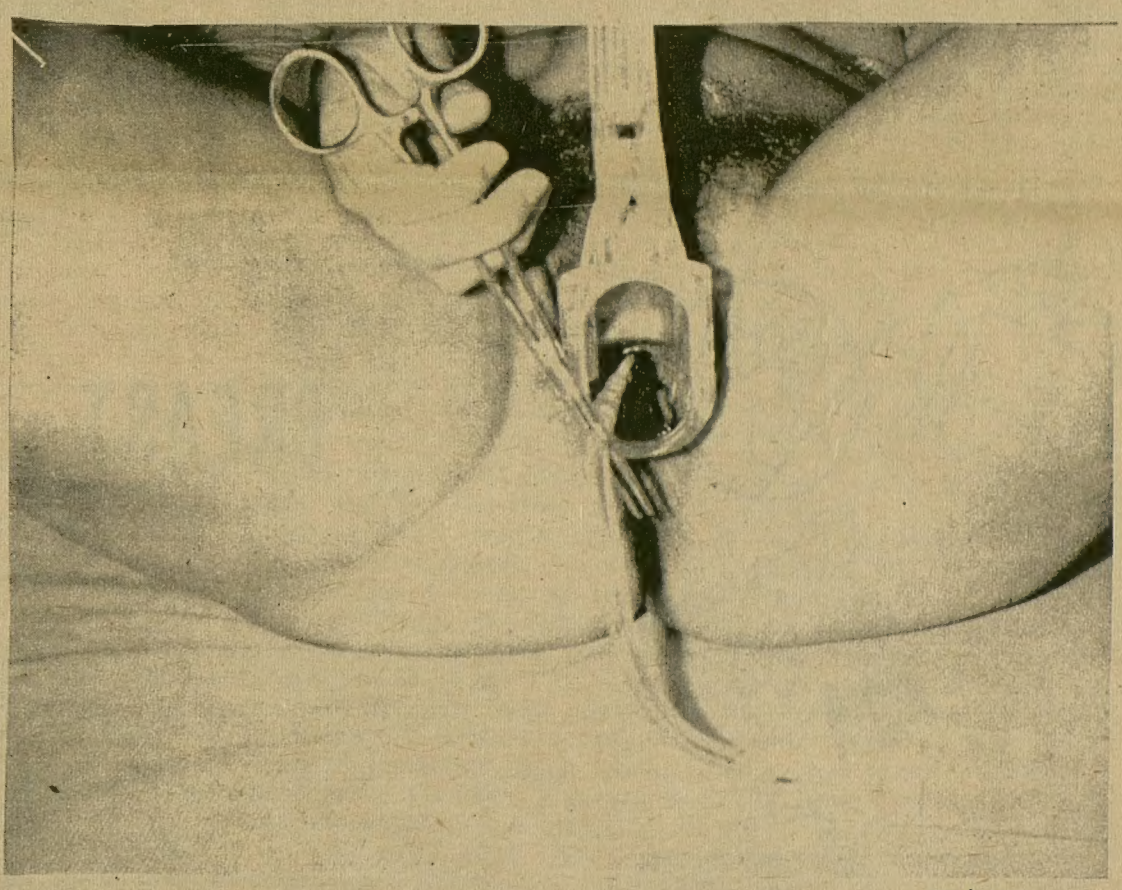


ENS/GAIL

4 mm. Karman cannula was inserted thru cervical canal into uterus. Then the flexible tubing attached to the nozzle of the specially modified syringe was clamped shut, and the plunger of the syringe was pulled out to create a vacuum. Still clamped shut, the tubing was attached to the end of the cannula.

Explanation of terms:

speculum-basic duck billed instrument used to hold vaginal walls apart and expose cervix.
vacuum syringe-50 cc syringe specially designed to create vacuum without allowing air to be injected or forced through end. *
cannula-4 mm. tube used to evacuate uterus. Karman cannula designed to conform to shape of uterus and to collapse before perforating. *

*Available Medical Concepts Box 6 El Segundo, Calif.

Peggy Grau

The essence of any form of birth control can be interpreted as an assurance of menstruation. The presently available methods of preventing conception (insuring menstruation), short of permanent sterilization, are not fully effective and, at the same time, offer considerable risk to the user. The most effective contraception technique now being marketed is the birth control pill which carries the risk of clotting, hypertension, carcinoma, not to mention the as yet unknown longterm effects to the woman and her offspring. The methods with no side effects, rhythm and diaphragm, have unacceptable rates of efficacy.

There is available to some women a mechanical form of menstrual insurance that is so simple that any woman can learn to use it at home, so free from long term side effects that it can be considered safer than the birth control pill, and, barring a tubal pregnancy, without chance of failure. The technique is menstrual extraction. It is currently being used by medics at University of Hawaii on women who have missed their period. Women are learning to extract their own late or pending menses through the Women's Movement. The procedure has been used at the Women's Medical Center in New York and at the Women's Abortion Clinic in Los Angeles by both physicians and paramedics. The Women's Abortion Clinic originally used the technique for self-implementation by women who were, for medical reasons unable to use the conventional means of effective birth control and who were unwilling to rely on rhythm or diaphragm.

The medical establishment will no doubt resist the spread of this concept since it not only offers women complete autonomy in the area of contraception, but also has the potential of completely eliminating an extremely lucrative field from their practice, that of birth control and abortion. They prefer to keep the practice of birth control totally within their sphere of influence. This is evidenced by the direction all research in birth control and abortion is presently taking. Our doctors and public officials are looking to prostaglandins for the answers to all problems in this area. These chemicals, presently outlawed in the United States because of their side effects which include severe nausea, vomiting and diarrhea (also the admitted cause of at least one death within the limited number of doses administered), once watered down to a "safe" dosage will be available, but still within the controls of the male dominated medical practice.

Any woman can learn to control her own reproductive system with menstrual extraction. Once this technique has been mastered it can be employed free from any controls of the medical society.

The actual act of extracting a menses, when performed by a capable person using proper instruments, is no more dangerous than administering an enema. Information about the location, appearance and nature of one's reproductive organs is a vital prerequisite to mastering menstrual extraction. The necessary equipment is: light, mirror, speculum, cannula, vacuum syringe and clamp for syringe tubing. The cannula and speculum should be sterilized (cold sterilization solution can be purchased at any sickroom supply store). A douche with Phisohex (1 tsp to quart warm water, rinse till clear) or Betadine is recommended to eliminate as many as possible of the vaginal bacteria. Hands should be scrubbed thoroughly with Phisohex or Betadine. The procedure: Arrange yourself in a semi-upright, self-examining position with light and mirror in place. Speculum, cannula and syringe should be readily available. Insert speculum and manipulate to expose cervix. Clamp tubing of syringe and withdraw plunger to create suction. Lay syringe aside. Introduce cannula through cervical canal into uterine cavity. Connect cannula and syringe tubing and remove clamp. Rotate cannula in a circular motion. Blood will pass through cannula and tubing into syringe or trap. Continue with this motion until you get nothing but foam for a few rotations.

(cont. on next page)

MENSTRUAL EXTRACTION
(cont. from page 7)

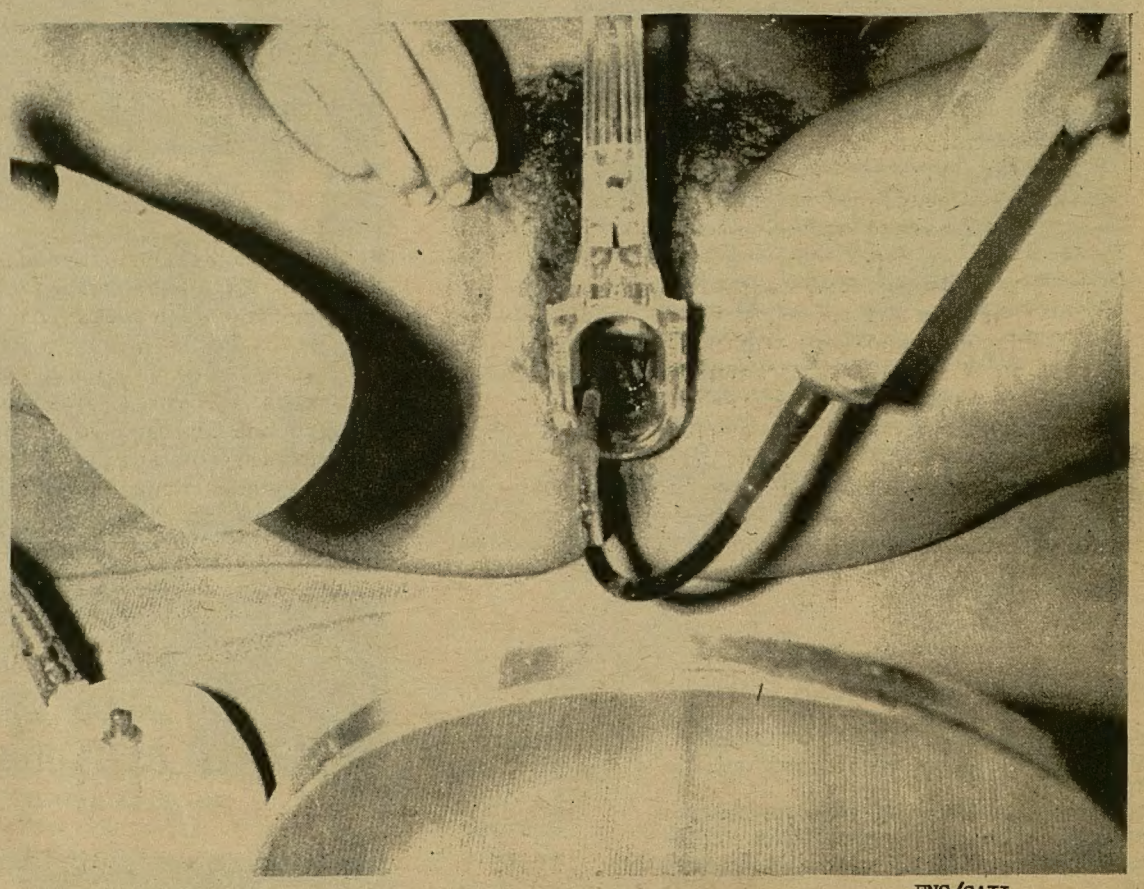
Withdraw cannula while it is still attached to syringe. Your menstrual blood will be inside the syringe and you will have reduced your period from five days to five minutes.

It is important to know what sensations to expect when you are performing this. When you insert the cannula expect to feel some resistance. The cervical canal is very tiny, expecially in the uterus that has not carried any pregnancies to term (nulliparas), and continued pressure will be required to introduce the cannula. Keep pushing gently until the cannula reaches the back wall of the uterus. (The cannula will enter the non-pregnant uterus approximately 2 to 4 inches depending upon uterine size and the number of pregnancies the uterus has experienced.) There will probably be some cramping when the cannula is inserted and you will be aware of the movement of the cannula. The sensation is strange and uncomfortable but without severe pain. Most women undergoing menstrual extraction experience cramping (it is considered unavoidable in the nulliparas uterus). The flexible cannula is incapable of damaging a normal, healthy uterus (this excludes those uteri badly scarred or damaged by venereal disease or traumatic childbirth) but it is still a good idea to allow your sensations to guide your movements. If any particular movement causes strong cramping or discomfort try replacing it with some other motion. Women who have extracted their menses a number of times report that the cramping following the first extraction is fairly strong, but that with more experience, confidence and expertise (not only in the technique but in relaxing the muscles in the pelvic area) they can extract their period and experience only the mildest of cramping immediately afterwards.

There are a few possible hazards which can easily be avoided. Make certain that your cannula and speculum are sterile. Avoid contamination of cannula by touching the vaginal wall. Use only vacuum syringe equipment that is designed to prevent air from entering the uterus. (Air, when forced into the uterine cavity, enters the blood vessels and sometimes cause fatal air embolism.) If you should get a fever of more than 100°, or have severe cramping, heavy bleeding and clotting, consult a physician. (At this point you should consider the possibility that you might have been pregnant at the time of the extraction and failed to remove all of the uterine contents. If this is the case, you would be in the process of miscarrying. This is a routine problem for any OB-GYN and can usually be handled with antibiotic and uterine contracting medication.) If you do not know the doctor and wish to avoid any lectures or chastisements, simply tell him that you don't know what's wrong, but that you suspect a miscarriage. If you employ the technique described here no one will be able to detect any instrumentation as there was none.

Women with uterine anomalies such as double uterus or stenopic cervix are not candidates for this procedure. Likewise, women with endometriosis, fibrous tumors, or whose uteri are badly scarred from severe cases of venereal disease should not try this procedure. They are safer and will be happier with the presently available birth control forms than they would be with the pain and possible damage that could result from imprudent use of this technique. Also, women who are more than four or five weeks late with their menses should not attempt menstrual extraction.

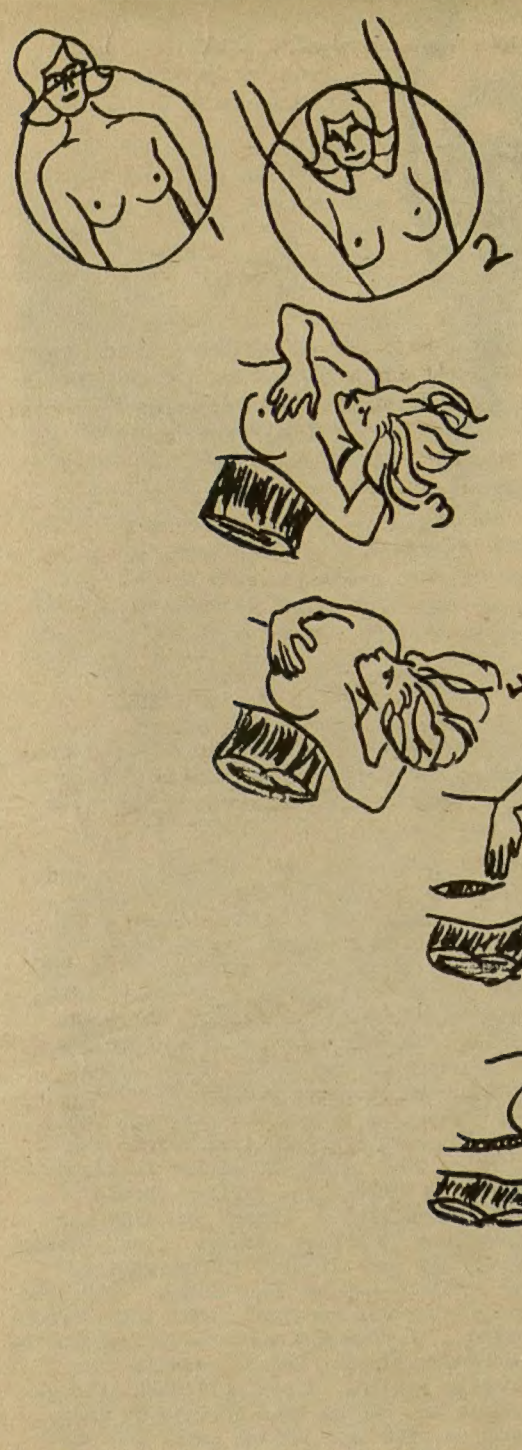
For the woman with a normal healthy uterus this technique offers a method of birth control that will leave her free from dangerous chemicals and devices that are, in fact, not wholly reliable.



ENS/GAIL

Clamp has been released and suction has begun. Rotate cannula slowly for a few minutes until greater resistance is noticed and blood begins to appear foamy.

BREAST SELF-EXAM



1

Sit or stand in front of a mirror, arms relaxed at your sides, and look for any change in size, shape and contour. Also look for puckering or dimpling of the skin and changes on the surface of the nipples. Gently press each nipple to see if any discharge occurs.

2

Raise both arms over your head, and look for exactly the same things. Note differences since you last examined your breasts.

3

From here on you will be trying to find a lump or thickening. Lie down on a bed, put a pillow or bath towel under your left shoulder, and your left hand under your head. With the fingers of your right hand held together flat, press gently against the breast with small circular motions to feel the inner, upper portion of your left breast, starting at your breastbone and going outward toward the nipple line. Also feel the area around the nipple.

4

With the same gentle pressure, feel the low inner part of your breast. Incidentally, in this area you will feel a ridge of firm tissue. Don't be alarmed-it's normal.

5

Now bring your left arm down to your side, and still using the flat part of the fingers of your right hand, feel under your left armpit.

6

Use the same gentle pressure to feel the upper, outer portion of your left breast from the nipple line to where your arm is resting.

7

And finally, feel the lower outer portion of your breast, going from the outer part to the nipple.

8

Repeat the entire procedure, as described, on the right breast using the left hand for the examination.

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MURDER

THE LEADING CAUSE OF CHILD DEATHS FROM BIRTH TO PUBERTY IS "ACCIDENTS". SHIT, THEY AREN"T "ACCIDENTS"...THEY'RE MURDERS. IN NURSING SCHOOL WE WERE TOLD THAT AROUND 50% OF THESE "ACCIDENTAL" DEATHS ARE BATTERED CHILDREN...THE POLITE WAY OF SAYING THAT THE LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH IN YOUNG PEOPLE IS MURDER BY THEIR PARENTS.

"ACCIDENTS?" GODDAMMIT, YOUNG PEOPLE'S BONES ARE FLEXIBLE...THEY DON"T BREAK EASILY- THEY"RE ALMOST LIKE A WAD OF CUSHION... Spectre Bbx 305 Ann Arbor, Mich. 48107

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The above article appeared in the last issue of Spectre, a women's newspaper out of Ann Arbor. It was included in a discussion of age chauvinism and the oppression of children by parents and the family. The women who wrote the article certainly had valid points to make about child abuse. It's true that children in our society are viewed as property and are treated as "not quite human beings". I agree with those criticisms and I think we should be working to develop new ways for children to live and to live with children through collective child rearing, day care, etc. But there were several things that were not discussed in the Spectre article that I believe should have been included. The charge of parents with the murder of children made me quite angry.

It's just impossible to deal with child abuse and the oppression of children with such simplicity. It's very easy for people who don't spend a great deal of time with children to talk about what to do and what not to do with them. Women who are alone with their children for huge stretches of time cannot be expected to be patient and unoppressive. Living with children, when you're a woman in a traditional nuclear family with no help in child care, is very hard. It's enough of a hassle that women do hit their kids, lock them in their rooms, stick them in their cribs when they're not sleepy, and sometimes fatally injure them. Being a parent, especially a mother, in a poor or working class family is as oppressive to the adults as to the children. Most women have no day care, little or no money to pay babysitters if they need or want to get out of the house, and most likely didn't have much choice in the decision to have children (given the expectations of society, birth control effectiveness and safety, and the availability of safe abortions.)

The article was right about one thing--child abuse is not an accident. Its a direct result of most women having no control over their lives.

PARENTS and SISTERS and BROTHERS

"I hate this society most of all...."

I have eight sisters and brothers, all younger than myself. My parents are working-class and have always had a lot of financial difficulty. My father's different jobs have never amounted to much and my mother has been helping to support us for about fourteen years, the last six of which have been mainly her responsibility. She's not very strong, and her married life has been very hard on her. My parents have always used corporal punishment, and in my father's case it has almost always been harsh and abusive. He's a large man and he's been a bartender and a bouncer for about twenty years. He increasingly uses extreme force, even on the youngest children. We are all used to being beaten and struck with belts, broom handles, shoes, two-by-four boards, and even the telephone receiver. He punches us with his fists, throws us against walls, and kicks us brutally. Since 1965 I have been through countless social workers and two psychologists who always told me that my father needed help. My father said I needed the help and he refused to see them. I had always been blamed for most of the problems in our house. I was the greatest financial hassle and I taught all my brothers and sisters every bad thing they knew. Although I was constantly reminded that I would never be missed, I was never allowed to leave for a foster home, and I was too young to be taken out until college. So the counselors and workers gave me the help (including Vocational Rehabilitation money for school) to keep me from offing myself or getting into trouble with the law. THANKS FOR THE HELP MOTHERFUCKERS, CHILD FUCKERS.

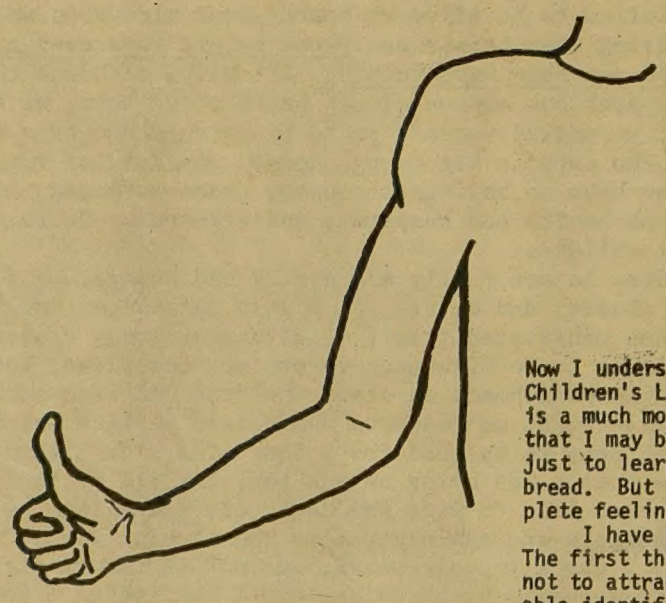
As a child I was constantly angry and miserable. Quite often, especially in high school, I had the most desperate aching depression about living with my parents. They hated me, and what problems they didn't know about, I didn't want them messing with. There was no privacy in our home, children were mindless and inferior. We felt like properties, liabilities, and our usefulness (or bothersomeness) would end at age 21, if not sooner. I'm responsible for you until you're 21, and until then you'll do as I say. I don't have to give you reasons for anything, this is my home, not yours. My parents used outrageous threats to maintain order and displayed little tenderness in dealing with us. I'll love you when you learn to mind. Don't come crying to me, there are enough people in this world who can't stand on their own two feet. Of course we hardly expressed it, but we seldom really thought our parents loved us. We felt that they just wanted to kick us around and take out all their problems on us. We never asked to be born. If you don't love us then let us leave. Loving parents aren't mean to their kids. They tried desperately to shape our lives and claimed to love us. Permissive parents don't care about their kids. They were upset about failing to control us and blamed us, we were fucked-up, bad kids who didn't know how to mind. All we ever ask is that you be a lady and tell the truth. Being poor was never supposed to make any difference, but at the same time, material wealth was the key to happiness. All you need in this world is a roof over your head and three squares a day. Are your clothes ragged? Don't you eat well enough? You have nothing to complain about. And when we weren't satisfied to be alive we heard about rich kids whose money will never bring them happiness. Those people have everything in the world and yet they have nothing. Actually, although there were always money problems and we always heard about them, we somehow thought that we really weren't poor. My parents now have a color television, two cars, a big enough house, and lots of furniture. But they also have no savings accounts, three mortgages, little insurance beyond health and hospital, and tremendous debts. All they own is their children.

The children in our family are pretty sad humans, we feel persecuted and abused, and we are all highly defensive. Our lack of self-worth has manifested itself in different ways. Violent tempers, tendencies to be dishonest to protect ourselves, and cutthroat to shift punishment on other children. In high school I had some fairly right on teachers who helped me like myself a little and it went to my head for a long time. The alternative to being on the bottom was being on the top. But all my fantastic talents didn't mean shit to kids who could use class insults against me, or to teachers and administrators who thought I was full of shit anyway. I was a trouble-maker, but not in the traditional sense. I didn't really break rules, but I challenged a lot of teachers and was brassy and arrogant, enough to warrant secret conferences about my potential political danger. Some of my other sisters are going through the same thing because they've been able to gain recognition and popularity. My sister who's 17 is the only exception so far. She does poorly in school and we've treated her terribly to make us look good. She retaliated by pleasing our parents and ratting on us. They praised her and we hated her all the more. She is the most like our father now, out of desperate defensiveness. She also has had responsibility for the youngest children since she was fourteen, being the "domestic" daughter. She's been my parents' greatest "success."

I know my parents feel hopelessly useless at times because they've failed to be the parents they wanted to be. Where did we go wrong? We've done what we thought was right. Other people's kids don't act like you do. They've oppressed us horribly, but they've been victims too, especially my mother. She always treated us better than our father did, and often ended up in the middle of raging feuds. Being Catholic and relatively straight-laced, she accepted thirteen pregnancies, nine of which produced a burden she should never have had to bear. She had no option but marriage and her ties to my father seldom allowed her to really stand up against him for us. But she never sold us out without feeling bad about it and trying to help us later. Too many times she forced us to accept bullshit about the Church, and a woman's role, but she wasn't meek and she didn't like rich people and she always discouraged us from making middle-class friends because she knew we'd get hurt when we finally got slapped with the differences. Stick with your own kind. Those people are out of your class, and they don't care about you. You can't be like them and you'll just get hurt. Who wants what they have? She'd often tell us something about Jesus saying that the rich man trying to get into Heaven is like a camel trying to get through the eye of the needle. Fuck Jesus, but fuck that rich jerk twice. My youngest sister in high school is a class officer and is quite popular. She hangs around with middle class kids and breaks her neck to dress, act, and be like them. She can't understand why my mother is so adamant about keeping her away from them and considers herself to be quite oppressed. In a way she is, because my parents are so frightened of what she may become (like pregnant) that they restrict her to the house for months for slight infractions. Some times my father goes into a rage and beats her up very badly and tells her that he's "not about to have another one like the oldest around." But I think class objections like theirs are valid, and although my sister is really suffering now and I wish they'd stop their tactics, I think she'll have a good class awareness.

For half of her marriage my mother spent all her time with five of us at home. She had a lot of work to do and we really weren't old enough to help. The pressures of money hassles, a weak body that was constantly sick and/or pregnant, and so much work caused her to have a nervous breakdown and physical collapse when I was five. While she was ill we had our first taste of life without mother and constant exposure to our father. When he had to share the responsibilities my mother faced alone with my aunt and a day babysitter he became enraged to the point of nearly killing us. One day when he was mad he started mumbling about taking us to different towns and leaving us there, or depositing us outside the orphanage in our town. He wasn't working, so there was little money, and the strain my mother always faced nearly made him flip out. One of my greatest fears from being a child was the thought of losing my mother permanently. After she started working things were always like that horrible time. A year ago she nearly died and my father told my sisters and brothers that if she died it would be their fault. I hate my father for saying things like that, but I hate this society most of all for forcing human beings into such frantic states of mind. Parents do oppress children, but who can be expected to handle themselves in this society in a powerless position like poor and working class parents, let alone be responsible for nine other human beings, or even one, all alone? My parents are greater allies to me than all the rich, middle-class people I went to school with, and at times I can't help not trusting people with more power to control their own lives than I may ever know. Having choices in these times means someone else doesn't have them, and I am determined to destroy that condition with all the strength my parents and sisters and brothers have had to give in heartbreak and suffering.

What are strong women made of?



Six months. One half of a year away from home. Never before have I been away from my home town for so long. Never have I been on my own for so long. As Bob Dylan says, *"How does it feel -- to be on your own -- no direction home -- a complete unknown -- like a rollin' stone!"* Six months of freedom, a new life style, digging sisterhood, happy times, new experiences, and, best of all, finding out that I am capable of taking care of myself. Also, six months of tears, confusion, lonliness, homesickness, unhappy times, yearning for "someone from back home," going hungry, the searches for a place to spend the night, and the new horror of being very poor. I have encountered all of these things, good and bad, in my short experience as a runaway.

I've definitely changed a great deal. Let's see -- what has happened to me? Since I've left home, I've: been to the Revolutionary Peoples' Constitutional Convention (and found out what a drag it was to follow men around at a male-oriented event), did shitwork for a radical, male-oriented organization, made love with men and didn't dig it, learned to rip-off, went on my first feminist demonstrations, learned about sharing and communal living (the good and the bad aspects)stopped shaving, learned not to trust people so much after being turned in to a Welfare-type agency and pulling out of that (a shitty experience), went to the Women's March on the Pentagon, learned to drive a car, finally realized that men don't respect women as people (especially fifteen-year-old women), started relating to being a runaway as a political thing, stopped believing in free schools, read The Dialectic of Sex, seriously considered the oppressiveness of babysitting after living with a family for a while, made love with a woman and really dug it, and radically changed my outlook on things from the Third-World-and-White-Male-Adult Freak to a Feminist-Youth Revolution. The rate at which I'm changing amazes--even scares me sometimes. Sometimes I think it's happening too fast and sometimes I know that I have a long way to go.

Occasionally I miss the luxuries of middle -class living. Recently, though, I've begun to look at things differently. We middle-class people are entirely too dependent on material wealth. It's just another part of our conditioning--and of course it's very profitable to business. This conditioning to luxury helps to keep our bodies weak and pampered. I mean, it's amazing when one stops to think of it -- from eating three good-sized meals a day and discarding enough to feed many people in Appalachia to preferring beds to sleep in. WHY must one possess so much -- cars, tables and chairs, televisions, radios -- all these articles could be shared -- while human beings could learn to live in a way much closer to nature. For the dainty, well-taken-care-of person I was, I realize how unrealistic this sounds. But the facts are that there are too many people on this planet, too little time to deal with it, too much poverty, and too much waste. When will it stop? It is high time people gave more thought to this kind of conservation.

About school. Hardly a day passes that I am not asked by some well-meaning stranger if I go to college or not. Or people ask if I've considered finishing my "education." One gets pretty sick of it after a while. The assumption is made that in order to be a legitimate person, I must attend classes. Drop-outs are supposed to experience a tremendous guilt-dumb complex. Of course, it's more acceptable for women to drop out than for men -- we're just going to get married and have children right away anyways -- but still it would be better to be a little brainy so our men could show us off with a bit more pride. Anyways, when I first left home, I viewed the situation as that I was giving up an education to work for social change. I no longer feel that way.

Now I understand that learning about sisterhood, Children's Liberation, strength, and survival is a much more relevant education. It is true that I may be forced to return to school -- just to learn a skill necessary for getting bread. But it won't be because of any imcomplete feelings.

I have some hints for sister-runaways. The first thing any fugitive must do in order not to attract attention is to assume a respectable identification. This is a very simple task. To begin, there are a number of foolproof ways of obtaining proof of age. The first is to look up the name of, say, a baby that was born in 1953 (which would make you 18) and died soon after -- and send away for their birth certificate. This is possible, since birth and death certificates are kept in separate places. From a birth certificate, most anything can be obtained. The second method is to get a phony ID from some underground producer. However, I wouldn't recommend this too highly, since there's more chance for a slip. The last way that I know of is to ask a friendly priest to fill you out a Baptismal certificate. That isn't accepted as readily as a birth certificate, but it can be helpful. After that you can get some everyday street ID, such as a Library card, credit cards, youth fare, social security, and a DRIVER'S LICENSE. A driver's license is very good to have. And the more middle-class you appear, the more convincing you will be. As well as

When you desperately want food, clothing, and other little necessities -- merely the everyday musts for survival, for Christ's sake, it's impossible to heed warnings to cease ripping off. When I started out, I just assumed I'd have to learn how to rip off WELL in order to survive and that I just wouldn't (or couldn't) get caught. Friend after friend warned me not to take the risk -- that THEY'D help me meet my needs. However, one can't depend on others all the time, and the wish to provide for one's self comes on strong. Especially if you never think you'll get caught. Well, I got caught. I had never heard of the kind of security the store had. It had windows on the ceiling which looked like mirrors. They filled out a confession form, which I had to sign, and released me without the police. Maybe I'll never rip-off again. I don't know. I wouldn't encourage my sister-runaways to rip-off.

It would take a book to pass along all the little Golden Rules for being a safe runaway. However, I shall just speak briefly about being cool. No proper amount of advice could be given in this respect -- it has to be learned by long and hard experience. First, if you must have communication with home, don't make any direct contacts. Either send letters via a different city than the one you're staying in (so the postmark won't give you away) or ask someone to make important calls for you FROM A DIFFERENT STATE, in a pay phone.

Nobody should know you're a runaway. Have a good story made up and stick to it -- you've graduated from high school and you're travelling around looking for jobs, your parents are retired, etc. From my experience, telling even the coolest person can be a wrong move. Knowing a runaway is an exciting thing to relate to a close friend -- and pretty soon you get to be the best-known runaway in town. And that isn't too good. Then, there will always be people who think they know what's best for you.

It's hard to explain. I think twice now before I ask a stranger the where-are-you-from-what-do-you-do-how-old-are-you kind of questions. In the first place, it's not REALLY important to know those things. Second, I know how it feels: the what-category-do-you-fall-in check-over. (Especially the chauvinistic "how old are you?".) Now, I'm not saying that you shouldn't try to check out someone who's acting piggish. I'm just saying that in general I wish people weren't so curious.

It's not a good idea to risk going to demonstrations, large meetings, etc. Also, consider that even if some underground pig knew you were under 18 he/she probably wouldn't turn you in and blow his/her cover -- they'd probably just keep an eye on you. (Another good reason to keep your mouth shut.) So, sister-runaways, play it cool.

A young man once commented that it must be easier for me as a runaway because I'm female. What bullshit! I immediately sent him an angry letter about sex roles and I've been thinking about it ever since. What came to my head right away, of course, was to ask him if HE had ever been hassled on the street, getting a place to stay, etc. Later the legal angle occurred to me. I haven't studied the laws much, but I know there are a great many states in which men are legally independent before women. Of course, parents give their male children more freedom in general, in the first place. That may explain why the majority of runaways are women. Running away from home is considered more of a crime for women than for men. We aren't supposed to be so uppity.

Sometimes I get so sick and tired of the questions people ask me concerning my parents -- like, "It must have been REALLY bad, huh?" My parents were extremely liberal -- in fact, a bit radical at times. We went to moratoriums together. My father was not too down on grass and certainly not long hair. My mother neither. And I did pretty good in school. But the thing is that even though the attitudes of my parents were somewhat radical, they still had to control me. And they sure did. As soon as I became a bit more radical than they, I would be prevented from going to meetings, demonstrations, etc.

that went along with my radicalization -- these things were all "too dangerous" for one reason or another. Well, I soon became convinced that goddam it, it was MY ass and therefore my business what I was doing with it. Suddenly, I started applying all that radicalization to myself and concluded that I shouldn't allow anybody to rule my life like that. So I split.

Then there are those who never have to be convinced that I was justified in leaving my parents -- runaways are always groovy, although they don't know just why. But these characters will eventually start bugging me about, "Do you let your parents know if you're all right --" Bullshit.

When I'm of "legal age" I shall go back to visit my old friends. I miss them often. Because of safety measures, I can't have any communication with them. All I can do is write them letters. It's all one way. How I would love to talk with them -- to know what they are thinking. I know that some -- in fact, most -- of them approve and maybe even admire what I'm doing. I wonder if they ever think in terms of themselves. And some of them, of course, don't think what I've done was such a good idea. But I can't wait to see my friends when I return. I love them all so much.

As for now, I have many good friends too. The atmosphere is different, though. Before, I was simply another schoolgirl among my friends. With the friends I have now, however, I'm a bit of a novelty, Somebody Different. I'm much younger than everybody else. At first I thought I could combat that agism so that it wouldn't interfere. But although my friends realize that I'm sensitive about being treated differently on account of my age, I still get the vibes sometimes that there's a tiny weeny difference between us. Often I get angry when, in conversation, someone makes some innocent comment about something (like: "He was being so childish --" or " -- and she's doing so good FOR HER AGE.") that escapes everyone but me for its offense to age.

I have learned a great deal about independence in these past months. Having been used to complete emotional and physical dependence on two people who controlled my life for fifteen years and trying constantly to fit the roles set up by a sick society makes it difficult to radically adjust myself to a whole new life style sometimes. There's a lot of lonliness and the frustration that comes when one thinks nobody understands her. Now, of course, this is exactly what the psychiatrists and psychologists want to read. They want runaways (especially runaway Lesbians) to be frustrated. Because I'm not happy with the roles society has laid out for me (as obedient child, sex object, etc.) to ensure its survival, there must be something WRONG with ME -- therefore I should have trouble striving to adjust to another culture. I've violated a lot of rules, so I know that the System's out to get me. I'm a left-winger, a Women's Libber, a Gay Libber, and a fatherfucker. So the System will keep on devising ways to make me pay for my violations. No education = no job = no bread. And the constant fear of any fugitive -- being caught -- is no longer too much fun to live with. It's there, everyday. The paranoia. The things that other people can do but I can't because they'd make me too obvious. In general, there are all the guilt and pressure trips that are always laid on Lesbians, independent women, runaways, and drop-outs.

Living within such a destructive society, how can one escape all the traps? It's a constant fight. We need each other. As Beverly Grant says, *"But if any of you got another plan then, let's get together and give each other a hand!"* We got to keep on truckin. But I think it takes a special kind of inner strength, too. Sometimes I wonder what strong women are made of. Maybe it'll take a long time to figure out. In the meantime, we each have to have faith in ourselves. We can't let ourselves be molded into anything. That's the only way we'll win. Sisterhood is powerful!!

(reprinted from oob)

by Mary, a runaway

women LOVING women

Recently a workshop on Women Loving Women was held for women interested in discussing lesbianism. All kinds of women were there -- gay women, straight women, bisexual women and "fuzzies" (an affectionately coined word for women who think they're gay but haven't actually had a gay experience). We began by everyone saying things that they liked about women -- such things as women's softness, strength, physical beauty, sensitivity, mutual trust, common experience, and emotional honesty and expressiveness were mentioned.

As we grew more comfortable with each other, the women who hadn't had gay experiences asked about things which were important for them to understand. They were beautifully honest and very basic questions to help further understanding between gay and straight women. These are some of the questions which were discussed there.

How do gay women make love without a penis?

Answer 1. Masters and Johnson have finally made public what many women have known all along: it's clitoral stimulation, whether direct or indirect, which leads to orgasm-not vaginal stimulation. That is not to say that pressure in the vagina doesn't feel good or is unnecessary for some women. But women can provide that pleasure for each other with their fingers or tongues. However, many women come to orgasm with no penetration of the vagina, and often prefer it that way.
Answer 2. Any woman who masturbates knows how women make love to each other. For that matter, any woman who has been lucky enough to have a male lover who didn't use his penis to make love to her, also knows. Women may use their hands, their mouths, their breasts, pressure from their knee or thigh -- anything that feels good to their lover.

How do you feel about not having babies?

Answer 1. It's just not true that lesbians can't have or have given up having a family just because they don't relate to men. If I really wanted to have a baby naturally, I'd go get pregnant in the time-honored way. But there are plenty of children born already, and single-parent adoption is one clear solution to that problem.
Answer 2. Also, there are many lesbians -- married, divorced and single -- who have children.
Answer 3. The myth of a woman's destiny and fulfillment being partially centered around having babies is pure bunk. A married woman with four children pointed out that child-bearing has been romanticized and mythologized all out of proportion.
Answer 4. I don't like kids, but that doesn't mean I have no family. All the women in the community are my family.
Answer 5. Several women explained that they live communally with people who do have children, and caring for and "raising" the children is done collectively.

What do you see as some of the differences between heterosexual and lesbian lovemaking?

Answer 1. Well, it's almost hard to talk of "differences" because my inclination is to think in terms of how making love with women is so much nicer than with men. But striving for objectivity, I'd say that one big difference is the result of there being so few preknown "goals" in mind when women make love. Even when a man is conscientiously trying to give a woman pleasure and bring her to orgasm, as long as he is using his penis anyway, there seems to be this goal of the great-mutual-orgasm-in-the-sky. That puts a subtle tension that is almost competitive on the people involved. With women I feel that there are so many more options. A woman may make love to her lover with no sexual goal in mind for herself, other than her enjoyment of her lover's pleasure. Of course, they may make love simultaneously as well.
Answer 2. Also, I feel that orgasm isn't this item of paramount importance when women make love. If it happens, great, but the joys of making love with a woman don't seem to be diminished if the experience isn't "successful" in what I think are heterosexual terms.
Answer 3. Another thing I like is that I often get off making love to a woman without her "reciprocating" the way she would have to be doing if I were a male. It's like her beauty and her ecstasy evoke those responses in me naturally, without her having to think about them. In fact, the more she abandons herself to her pleasure, the more exciting it is for me.

Can you be politically but not sexually gay? Like if you're celebate?

Answer 1. Sure, I guess. It seems to be increasingly common with women into WL for them to know they don't want to relate to men and in fact don't, but they feel real uptight about calling themselves gay because they've never had a physical relationship with a woman. I wish women in that place would read "Woman-Identified Woman," a really fantastic article. I feel that if a woman believes she's gay -- that is, she defines herself in woman-identified ways, she knows her goals/priorities/self-concept arise from the woman she is and not what men would have her be and do, then she has a right to say she's gay.
Answer 2. Definitely. Being gay isn't simply a sexual definition. It's all those things just described. And women in that place will eventually and naturally find that someday their emotional/sexual self will respond to a woman and it will be expressed sexually.
Answer 3. It's been said a lot and I agree--"political" and "personal" are not mutually exclusive aspects of a person's life. Sooner or later you see how they merge into one. No matter which place you are one leads to the other. If your politics have led you not to relate to men that's bound to affect your personal life; and if your personal life, sexually, is involved with women, sooner or later you see that's a political thing.

Do men have to be hated in, or excluded from, a gay woman's life altogether?

Answer 1. No, of course not. But mainly I think that's a negative way to look at it.
Answer 2. I agree. It just makes sense that if all your priorities revolve around women, you'll spontaneously relate to fewer and fewer men. And we all know there are plenty of good reasons for not relating to most men.
Answer 3. Yeah. Too many people have this stereotype that lesbians are irrational man-haters (the old male rap about a lesbian being a lesbian because she can't get a man). The point is lesbians are woman-lovers. That's a real positive, beautiful thing.

What are some of the problems of being gay in a heterosexual society?

Answer 1. So many of the answers here are obvious: constant play- acting to keep jobs, family approval, straight friends who would freak out if they knew. It infuriates me to see heterosexual couples holding hands or kissing in public -- if we did that all kinds of shit would come down. Even lesbians who are privileged and can afford to be up front personally have to be on guard because they could endanger their friends' security so easily.
Answer 2. The isolation was always the worst problem for me. Lesbians who aren't in touch with a gay community -- often they may not know any other gay people -- have to deal with so much. They have no one else for support and understanding, no models of lesbians who've made it through problems similar to theirs, no one to socialize with naturally. For so long, before the woman I loved and I ever knew any other gay women, we always had to pose as good friends, play the heterosexual game surfacely, etc. etc. Now that I've met lots of gay women I feel incredibly stronger and more "natural." It pisses me off to read articles by straight shrinks talking about how neurotic homosexuals sometimes are, as if that were "the cause of the disease," instead of seeing the society as both the cause and the disease. And I know there are countless lesbians who still live isolated lives, and will until society as we know it no longer exists.
Answer 3. Shit -- everywhere you look: TV, movies, magazines, advertizements, everywhere: sexist/homosexist propaganda to perpetuate straight society and benefit straight men.
Answer 4. It's the forced duplicity in everything -- you're isolated from your family, and you can't be honest with the people you really want to be honest with. I've known women who have come out to their best friends -- women who had known, loved, and accepted them completely for years -- and the "best friend" had to stop and think about whether she could accept that, still be friends. It makes me mad that a woman would do that, but I'm madder at the society that teaches the shit that causes such an inhuman reaction.

Other good questions were asked, which were too heavy to deal with on this page. We have ideas on these but we'd like to hear what other people think.

1) How do straight women oppress gay women?

2) Is being gay a prerequisite for being considered a serious, really committed revolutionary WL woman?

3) What is the difference between being bisexual and being gay? How does that difference read politically?

I IDENTIFY...

I once wrote an article for AIAW about gayness from the perspective of a straight woman. It is a defensive and nervous piece of writing. At the time, I was scared to death that gay women were "after my body" but could never work through this feeling because I was too embarrassed to ask anybody about it. I think I was afraid of two things: I would be rejected by gay women; I would be accepted by gay women.

I knew that as a straight woman I had begun to identify with women almost totally. My priorities lay with women and I knew in my gut that I could sleep with them; that our hugs and other physically supportive gestures were SEX.

The trouble was that I kept validating my experiences with women with heterosexual norms. I put meaning onto physical contact as if the women were men--as if what was going on in their heads were the same things that happen in mens' heads. (It can happen that gay women "think" like men but only because gay women, too, may be affected by the pigshit that our society calls "sex mores.")

The whole trip started with Martha when she told me that she "loved a woman." Not having very many preconceived ideas about loving a woman except your basic lesbian stereotype I, of course, zeroed in on the physical aspect of that relationship. I didn't freak out. I intellectualized the whole idea behind identifying with women. When I finally did panic I did it quietly and didn't tell anyone.

When I began attending gay parties, with the support of Martha, my presence signalled that I was gay--intellectually, at least. That's what my line was; the line between intellectually and actually was drawn because I had not actually related physically to a woman in bed. But there's more to it than that.

At these parties I heard women talking about each other: "So and so has such a full body" or "So and so has such beautiful breasts." Other times, the comments were made woman to woman, kidding each other about their bodies and physical relationships. Gay women made me nervous. I put the blame on them instead of myself. After all, wasn't I beginning to draw myself in, limiting myself?

I then went through a period of wanting to "hurry up and be gay." I wanted a woman to proposition me. Surely it should have been obvious to me that I was viewing the gay community from a heterosexual background. I expected gay women to treat me the way men had. When I heard "So and so has beautiful breasts" I flashed on a male saying " Look at those big jugs." This means 1) they're mine to speak of, 2) big jugs being the valued product.

In the context of the women I identify with, comments made to and about other women's bodies are not offensive because theirs is not a male orientation. "So and so has beautiful breasts" means 1) I identify with you as a woman and I love your body as I love mine, 2) all women have beautiful breasts.

Neither of the latter are realizations easily arrived at because of the nature of heterosexuality. Before loving women I did not like my own body. It somehow did not belong to me to like. I didn't make any real decisions about it other than how to make up my face so that a man could love it, etc. My sexuality was determined by the men I related to and my body belonged to them. That's what their comments told me.

With women I saw where their comments came from--out of respect for women as a whole. Too, I saw womens bodies in a new way: not as competition or as objects but as extensions of individuals. I began to see my own body as individual and because women didn't make any assumptions about whether I should or should not relate to them physically, I decided. I was in control. My body was allowed to move freely and breathe.

Finally I have come to see being gay as a way of not limiting myself as opposed to the stereotype that so many straight women have of lesbians. Finally I am not being valued or de-valued on the basis of my physical appearance. In fact I have no problem dealing with my gayness anymore in terms of the gay community. Now I have new fears to work through: trying to exist in a society knowing that I did not make a choice to be gay, that there is no choice when your priorities lie with women; that the world is a limited place when the straight women in it allow little room for gay women to be open with them because of their refusal to deal with their own homosexuality. It is ironic that I have ended up with the problem that I laid on gay women in the first place.

i loved my first grade teacher.
she was a nun with a sexy smile
and she touched me.
but i couldn't tell her
how i loved her
with my body -
not even with my mouth.
i had to tell her lies
like: "I like you Sister Mary Robert Marie."

i loved Jacque.
she had a black woman's arrogant eyes
and my heart.
i told her in the dark
and she agreed.
we loved with our hands tied.

i broke.

people gotta know that
i love women.
if they don't know that they don't
know me and
i need to be known.
so i'm loving my sisters
with the lights on
with my hands
free.

i can't be a lie anymore.

I ask you a lot of questions
and you answer them, and
it's no big deal

We never talk about
our relationship
you know--yeah, i know
and it's no big deal

Saying goodnight to you
is no big deal

Probably i trust you
more than anyone else
it figures

But we never talk about
having a relationship
and it's not that kind of heavy
to be alone with you

Like i'm aware now
of not to use anyone else's
line on you

But i don't know how to tell you,
how to end a
not-a-love poem